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ABSTRACT

The critical incidents method is an instructional method that is particularly suited for use with adult learners. The method involves the following sequence of activities: brief introduction to the subject under consideration, short explanation of the critical incident technique, presentation of the critical incident and directions, group work and reporting, synthesis, distribution of materials and closure, and evaluation. The strength of the method is that, drawing upon recognized principles of adult education, it actively involves participants by capitalizing upon their experience, thereby making possible the application of new insights and behaviors to a relevant practice setting and ensuring relevancy to the learners' situations. (This report includes criteria for using the critical incidents method effectively, guidelines for facilitators before, during, and after the event, a sample group activity that incorporates the method, and a sample set of evaluation questions. (MN)

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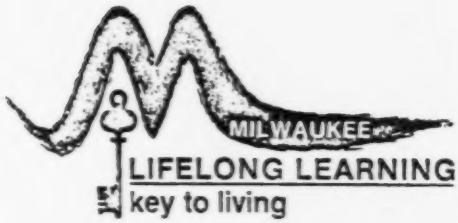

PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH: USING CRITICAL INCIDENTS TO INVOLVE PARTICIPANTS

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PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH: USING CRITICAL INCIDENTS TO INVOLVE PARTICIPANTS

Adult educators continually find themselves in the position of addressing adult groups. The presentation frequently evolves into a lecture with little involvement of participants. It is a continuing challenge to find effective strategies for engaging participants; the critical incident technique is one key for effecting attitude change.

The use of this instructional method is based on three principles of adult learning gleaned from the adult education literature. This method is defined as an instructional technique and the process steps are identified. Criteria for effective use are listed along with guidelines for the facilitator who chooses to use this technique. Finally, evaluation approaches are considered.

MAJOR PRINCIPLES OF ADULT LEARNING

The major principles of adult learning that are applied in the critical incident technique are:

-capitalize on the experience of the learners

-engage learners in active participation

-insure relevancy to the learners' situations

THE CRITICAL INCIDENT TECHNIQUE--What is it?

The critical incident technique is an instructional method that:

-actively involves participants

-by capitalizing upon their experience

-resulting in application of new insights and behaviors to a relevant practice setting.

The critical incident technique involves this sequence of activities:

-brief introduction to the subject under consideration
-brief explanation of the critical incident technique
-presentation of the critical incident and directions
-group work
-group reporting
-synthesis
-distribution of materials and closure
-evaluation

CRITERIA FOR EFFECTIVE USE

Very Effective	Less Effective
The Event	
-when there are presentation options	-when "contract" demands some other format
-when audience is likely to be open to alternate formats	-when audience has been primed to expect a lecture
-when there is not a critical need to audio- or video-tape the event	-when sponsors must record the event for subsequent marketing
-when published proceedings need not capture the event as it transpires	-when proceedings must report the event as it transpires
Goals and Objectives	
-in developing awarenesses and insights regarding value and belief systems	-for dissemination of new information
-in exploring alternative strategies and behaviors	-for skill building
-in exploring motivations and feelings	

CRITERIA FOR EFFECTIVE USE

Very Effective	Less Effective
Time	
-when a block of 45 to 90 minutes is allocated	-when a period of less than 45 minutes is available
Setting	
-with flexible room arrangements	-with fixed seating in a tiered auditorium
-when a final synthesis can be visually presented	-when no final visual presentation is possible
Audience	
-when participants have appropriate experience to build upon	-when participants have little or no experience in the subject area
-when participants will have the opportunity to employ learning in present or future practice settings	-when participants have no need to apply new learning

CRITERIA FOR EFFECTIVE USE

Facilitator

Very Effective	Less Effective
-when the facilitator is able to be flexible in accommodating audience differences	-when the facilitator is inexperienced in tuning in to and adapting to audience differences
-when the facilitator is able to deal with ambiguity and see things through multiple perspectives	-when the facilitator prefers to control or predict a limited array of outcomes
-when the facilitator is more comfortable in the synthesizing role	-when the facilitator is more comfortable in the information dissemination role
-when the facilitator has engaged in careful advance planning	-when the facilitator has had insufficient advance notice to prepare

GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATORS

Before the Event

-review conditions under which the critical incident technique may be used most effectively

-plan the presentation

create critical incidents

- should be specific
- should be brief
- should pose a single dilemma

create directions for diverse groups

- for the wholly "novice" group, provide not only explicit directions but also structure
- for the "expert" group, provide explicit directions but less structure

review personal knowledge and experience so that you can fulfill a synthesizing role

plan sequence of activities

plan evaluation process

- obtain information from participants in regard to both the content and the process

GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATORS

During the Event

-in facilitating group work, don't interrupt with your own comments, but provide help when asked

-elicit assistance with materials if needed

-keep careful watch on time

-during synthesis, don't preempt input from the group

-during feedback, be certain all participants see and hear the input

-provide closure

-allow sufficient time for evaluation

GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATORS

After the Event

-review participant evaluations

-conduct self-evaluation

-if you are planning to do a similar presentation in the future, make necessary alterations

GROUP ACTIVITY

You will have 10 minutes to complete the following activity.

1. Designate a recorder/reporter for your group. This person will record the group responses and report them at the end of the 10-minute period.

2. Discuss the following incident:

   You are preparing to present a concurrent session at the National Adult Education Conference on an issue of current interest in the field. You want to elicit a variety of positions on this issue. Most importantly, you want to:

   - -actively involve the participants in the session
   - -draw on their experience
   - -make the subject relevant to their own situations.

   You may assume the following:

   - -a group of adult educators with varying levels of experience
   - -a 60-minute block of time
   - -a room with movable tables and chairs
   - -35 participants.

3. What kind of activities would you develop for your session? The recorder/reporter should record the list on the paper provided.

4. At the end of the 10-minute period, we will re-form as a large group.

SAMPLE
EVALUATION

1. List one new insight you have gained about conference presentations.

_____

2. List one new approach to conference presentations you have learned about.

_____

3. List one of your own motivations which influences what you do in conference presentations.

_____

	not at all		somewhat		very much
4. How actively have you participated in this session?	1	2	3	4	5
5. Has this session been relevant in helping you rethink what you do in conference presentations?	1	2	3	4	5
6. Have you tapped into your own experience in working through the critical incident?	1	2	3	4	5

7. How satisfied are you with both the content and the process explored during this session?

_____

_____

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